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INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 5899  
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 5107  
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES PRIORITY 0969  
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ PRIORITY 1578  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 9780  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 1650  
RUEHSN/AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR PRIORITY 0763  
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO PRIORITY 3220  
RUEHAO/AMCONSUL URCAO PRIORITY 0541  
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 0255  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY  
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0418

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000217

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)

SUBJECT: ZULIA GOVERNOR ACCUSED OF COUP PLOTTING

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT R. DOWNES FOR 1.4 (D)

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Summary  
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[11](#). (C) Zulia Governor and potential presidential contender Manuel Rosales is engaged in heavy mudslinging with the mayor of Venezuela's second largest city, Maracaibo. Mayor Gian Carlo Di Martino accuses Rosales of traveling to Bogota to meet with Colombian military officials and exiled Venezuelans who were plotting to overthrow the Chavez regime. Rosales, one of only two Venezuelan opposition governors, immediately denied the claims saying that he hadn't been to Colombia in years, an assertion supported by the fact that the only evidence so far has been determined by the Venezuelan government to be a forgery. Yet, investigations are ongoing and it appears as if this is another case of the BRV using trumped up charges to attack its political opponents in the run-up to December's presidential elections. End Summary.

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More Treason  
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[12](#). (U) Zulia, a state in western Venezuela known for its political independence and still-considerable oil reserves, is proving to be an important political battleground in the run-up to December's presidential elections. Zulia Governor Manuel Rosales is embroiled in a political brawl with the mayor of Venezuela's second largest city Maracaibo. Mayor Gian Carlo Di Martino has accused Rosales of traveling to Bogota from July 22-23 to meet with Colombian military officials and exiled Venezuelans who were plotting to overthrow the Chavez regime. In addition to Rosales, Di Martino also alleged that former 2002 coup leader Pedro Carmona Estanga was present at this meeting.

[13](#). (C) Rosales is a long-time political operator in Venezuela and one of only two governors from an opposition party. Smooth and charismatic, Rosales is popular in his home state and is being mentioned by many as a possible national opposition candidate in the December presidential elections. He is also well known for signing the infamous Carmona Decree during the April 2002 coup, which frequently draws accusations of treason from Chavistas.

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More Investigations  
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¶4. (C) Di Martino, who is thought of by many as a political opportunist and Chavista by convenience rather than conviction, levied the accusations on January 2. He followed up a few days later with a signed statement by Colombian prosecutors claiming to have seen Rosales at the meeting in July. Rosales, who had earlier offered to resign if presented with evidence, quickly denounced the document as an obvious forgery. Surprisingly, Chavez ally and Interior and Justice Minister Jesse Chacon backed up this claim, stating that his department had studied the document and found it to be a fake. Local media later reported that Chacon had sent the document to the Colombian Attorney General for verification. The Colombian AG determined it was a forgery after questioning the signatories with a polygraph.

¶5. (U) This determination didn't end the accusations, however. In his statement, Chacon declared that while the document didn't prove Rosales' attendance at the meeting, the investigation would continue. For his part, Di Martino said it didn't matter that the signatures were fake; the statement on the paper is what was important. In retaliation, Rosales' supporters in the state legislature started their own investigation and have subpoenaed Di Martino three times to appear at hearings and present proof of his allegations. They also took out a full page newspaper advertisement castigating Di Martino for making false allegations and presenting fraudulent evidence. Di Martino has yet to appear at any of the hearings and all of the investigations are still ongoing.

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Governor Cancels Meeting with Ambassador  
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¶6. (C) As an indicator of the highly charged nature of the current political climate, both Governor Rosales and his highest-ranking anti-narcotics official canceled meetings scheduled with the Ambassador during his trip to Zulia on January 27. Both blamed the intense political situation and hoped to reschedule at a later time when things have died down (septel).

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Comment  
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¶7. (C) Rosales and Di Martino are frequent political sparring partners, so this sort of thing is not uncommon in Zulia, where the mayor and governor often battle each other for stature. However, the current political climate in Zulia seems to be particularly intense and likely part of a broader Chavista effort to discredit its political opponents. While the first piece of evidence was decidedly fake, the Chavistas are perfectly capable of fabricating new, and perhaps more professional, forgeries. If anything can be learned from the Danilo Anderson case, it is that the BRV will keep producing evidence and changing facts and allegations in order to attack its political opponents. While it seems that at this time even Rosales would stand little chance of beating Chavez in December, the BRV appears to be taking few chances with any of the potential contenders.

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